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Effects of Anti-Masonry on the Masonic Fraternity, 1826-1856

BY BRO. ERIK MCKINLEY ERIKSSON, Iowa

IT is inevitable that the Masonic Institution should have been seriously affected by the great wave of anti-Masonry which followed Morgan's disappearance. However, during the years which have intervened little has been done to determine just what happened to the Fraternity, though there has been much generalizing. Anti-Masons, even at the present time, glibly dispense the information that organized Freemasonry was exterminated and point to the disappearance of Masonry in Illinois as proof. They might also point to the fact that the Grand Lodge of Michigan became defunct for a time and that the Grand Lodge of Vermont was practically suspended for ten years. But setting forth such facts does not prove their contention for there were twenty-three other Grand Lodges which did not become defunct and which did not suspend.

Masonic historians have also failed, thus far, to make a thorough study of the effects of anti-Masonry. They, too, have been content with generalizations such as "[anti-Masonry] was disastrous to the growth and progress of the Institution." What apparently happened in a few Grand Jurisdictions has been accepted as sufficient evidence to prove that anti-Masonry almost exterminated the Masonic Fraternity in the United States. They have pointed to the decrease in the number of lodges represented at the annual communications as illustrative of the devastation wrought by the anti-Masonic movement. But, in so doing, they have failed to consider that there might have been other factors than anti-Masonry operating to bring about a decline in Masonic strength during the period following the Morgan affair.

When one studies the situation in each Grand Jurisdiction separately he becomes convinced that anti-Masonry, though a factor of great importance, was not by any means solely to blame for the low state to which the Masonic Institution fell during the decade of the thirties. In some jurisdictions Masonry was in a low state before 1826 due to internal troubles of various kinds. In the case of most of the Grand Lodges, the percentage of lodges represented at the various communications before 1826 was not high. The development of anti-Masonry, of course, brought about a further decline in attendance.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CHOLERA EPIDEMIC

Furthermore, in explaining the situation, especially in the thirties, there was a factor that seems entirely to have escaped the historians, and that was the prevalence of cholera in the country. During the period beginning about 1830 the whole western world was swept by an epidemic of cholera that brought death to many and created a great fear among the people. It is impossible to determine just how much effect this epidemic had in causing lodges to die because the members feared to congregate. Nor can its influence in causing non-representation at the communications of the Grand Lodges be determined.

Conversely, it is impossible to think that cholera did not have a harmful effect on the Institution, aiding in producing conditions which have heretofore been attributed to anti-Masonry alone.

Still another factor that must be given consideration was the financial depression and panic which occurred during the period. Whether due to the "removal of the deposits" from the Second Bank of the United States or to manipulations of the Bank, the fact remains that, beginning late in 1833 and extending into the spring of 1834, there was a widespread depression. Then followed a few years of "good times" characterized by an orgy of speculation. In 1837 a panic occurred which gripped the whole country. In some localities its effects were felt well into the decade of the forties. The resultant difficulty of securing money must be recognized as a factor in aiding Masonry's decline and delaying its recovery. Members could not pay their dues to local lodges, and these lodges could not discharge their obligations to the Grand Lodges.

THE EFFECT IN NEW YORK STATE

Since the Morgan affair occurred in western New York it is obvious that the effects of the ensuing anti-Masonic excitement would first be felt there. In New York the ground was well prepared before 1826 for the coming of anti-Masonry, as has been pointed out. (1) To compare the small representation at the Grand Lodge communications in the thirties with the representation in 1827 does not tell the story, for 1827 was an unusual year in New York Masonic history. A comparison with earlier years gives a more accurate view. An examination of the Grand Lodge Proceedings as early as 1817 reveals an unhealthy condition existing at that time in the Masonic Institution in the state. There were 293 lodges on the list but of these only 30 were represented at the annual communication on June 4, 1817. There were 10 lodges listed as having "Ceased to Work" while 16 were listed under "Warrant Surrendered." There were listed 47 suspensions for non-payment of dues and 5 expulsions of un-Masonic or immoral conduct. At least 17 warrants for new lodges were issued during the year, indicating that even that early an over-rapid expansion was taking place.

In 1818 only 28 lodges were represented, and it was apparent that some action was necessary. Therefore in 1819, the "dead timber" was eliminated and the lodges were renumbered. So rapidly had new lodge been created that there still remained 323 on the list of which 82 were represented. By 1821 the lodges were again in a low state. While 79 were represented, 179 others were reported as in arrears for two years or more! In 1822 there were represented 110 lodges an in 1823 there were 112 represented. In the latter year internal dissensions came to a head and the Grand Lodge was split. The result was the formation of a City Grand Lodge and a Country Grand Lodge, whose rivalry in the following years was a factor of prime importance in preparing the ground for anti-Masonry.

Each Grand Lodge tries to outdo the other in chartering new lodges with the result that in some localities too many lodges were created to be properly supported. Likewise, as a result, unworthy candidates were admitted who were among the first to secede from the Fraternity after the anti-Masonic excitement began. The Country Grand Lodge, the stronger of the two, at its annual communication in 1824, granted warrants for 30 new lodges. In the same year, at its annual communication, the City Grand Lodge created 11 new lodges. At the communications the following year the Country Grand Lodge granted 46 new warrants while the City Grand Lodge granted 12.

Meanwhile efforts were being made to reunite the Grand Lodges with the result that on June 7, 1827, they were merged. The interest aroused in the proposed merger resulted in an extraordinarily large representation, for at the communication of the merged Grand Lodges there were present the representatives of 228 lodges. It is significant that, at this merged communication, 14 petitions for warrants for new lodges were granted. It is very evident from this that anti-Masonry had not as yet affected the Masonic Institution. Seemingly, Masonry in New York was, in 1827, at the peak of prosperity, yet, it should be noted the a t there were 84 lodges which had made no returns since 1822.

POLITICAL ENEMIES OF CRAFT

From the evidence presented it should be clear that anti-Masonry alone did not bring about the decline in Masonic strength in New York. There can be no question but that anti-Masonry, once organized so as to combine religious fanatics and political opportunists, such as Thurlow Weed, William H. Seward and Millard Fillmore, exercised a devastating effect on the Fraternity, but it is just as certain that the Masons of New York were, to some extent, to blame for their own troubles.

By early 1828, it was apparent that the anti-Masonic movement was having an effect on the Masonic Institution. In fact, from the time of the beginning of the Morgan investigations and trials, there had been public renunciations of Masonry by members in western New York. A group of these gave encouragement to political anti-Masonry by holding conventions at Le Roy on Feb. 19 and July 4, 1828.

THE EFFECT WITHIN THE FRATERNITY

The attendance at the Annual Communication of 1828 was only slightly affected, as there were 130 lodges represented, as compared with 142 represented in the two Grand Lodges in 1825. However, during the year 1828 only 3 warrants for new lodges were issued and these were the last for some years. There were 103 suspensions for non-payment of dues and 8 expulsions for un-Masonic conduct as compared with 38 suspensions and 9 expulsions in the combined lodges in 1825.

After 1828, the effects of anti-Masonry, on the individual Masons, on the local lodges and on the Grand Lodge began to be more apparent. Early in 1829 occurred the first organized movement looking to the surrender of the local lodge charters. On Feb. 20, a circular was issued by 76 Masons of Ontario County recommending to the lodges and chapters of western New York "the expediency of returning their charters." On March 13, six lodges of Monroe County, including that at Rochester, surrendered their charters to the Grand Lodge in "acquiescence to public opinion." However, contrary to a rather general opinion, this example was not widely followed. On May 5, 1829, delegates from 19 lodges in Cayuga and Onondaga Counties held a meeting. Instead of adopting the course taken by the Monroe County Masons, they drew up an address disclaiming all knowledge of the Morgan affair prior to Morgan's disappearance and denying all the charges made against the Fraternity. They declared, "We venerate Masonry for its antiquity, we admire it for its moral principles, and we love it for its charity and benevolence." The following resolution was also adopted:

Resolved, That in the opinion of this convention it would be inexpedient and improper to take measures for the surrender of Masonic charters, and that our brethren be respectfully advised to adopt no measures in relation to that subject.

Similar action was taken by a convention of 114 delegates representing 14 lodges and 5 Royal Arch Chapters of Chenango, Cortland and Madison Counties, held Sept. 2, 1829. Complete figures show that, during the whole period of the anti-Masonic excitement, only 76 lodges, out of the 484 existent in 1825, surrendered their charters.

Forty-three fewer lodges were represented at the 1829 Annual Communication than were represented the previous year. The fact that the dues of 23 lodges were remitted, shows that many Masons were not paying their dues, though only 22 individuals were reported during the year as suspended for that reason. It should be noted in passing that in 1829 the anti-Masons made unsuccessful attempts to secure the passage of laws by the New York legislature forbidding "extra judicial oaths" and barring Masons from serving on juries when one party in a case was a Mason and the other was not.

THE GRAND LODGE VISITORS

In 1830 there was a further decline in the Grand Lodge representation, as is shown by the accompanying chart. (2) At the annual communication that year a system of Grand Lodge "Visitors" for each county was inaugurated, it being the duty of each "Visitor" to visit all the lodges in his district, to examine into their condition and to receive the surrender of their charters, jewels and other property if they wished to give them up. Action was also taken to remit the dues of delinquent lodges under certain prescribed conditions which had to be complied with by December, 1830, in order to prevent forfeiture of their charters.

At the 1831 session, the Grand Lodge hesitated to take drastic action against delinquent lodges. It contented itself with passing a resolution declaring that lodges which had not met for a year or more should forfeit their warrants if they did not meet before June, 1832. A resolution was also passed requiring lodges in arrears for ten years or more to make returns by the time of the next annual communication or forfeit their warrants.

In the June, 1832, communication of the Grand Lodge, the threatened drastic action was taken. The warrants of 5 lodges were forfeited because a "citation" of the last annual communication had not been answered; 84 lodges which had made no returns since 1822 also had their warrants forfeited. The Grand Secretary was likewise instructed to demand the warrants of 23 lodges which had not met for over a year. This form of procedure was also followed in later communications so that, by 1836, no less than 338 lodges had had their warrants forfeited by the Grand Lodge; 45 of these later forfeitures occurred in 1833, 89 in 1834 and 92 in 1835. While this drastic action cleared out the dead lodges, it was not without its complications, for, out of all the warrants ostensibly surrendered or forfeited, only 54 had been collected by the Grand Secretary in 1836. The scattering about of the old warrants presented excellent opportunity for the development of clandestine Masonry and for a time constituted a serious problem.

THE TURNING OF THE TIDE

So far as anti-Masonry was concerned, the year 1836 marked the turning point for the Masonic Fraternity in New York. At the communication in June of that year, the Grand Secretary, James Herring, made a significant report in which he reviewed the events of the past ten years. He called attention to the fact that anti-Masonry in the state was rapidly dying out and that "the revival of Masonic labors and

usefulness begins to be manifest." As concrete evidence of this there was presented the petition of Ark Lodge, No. 160, to be restored, which petition was granted. Later in the year two other lodges were revived.

In 1837 Masonry in New York was well on the road to recovery when its progress was interrupted by another split in the Grand Lodge growing out of an attempt to discipline certain Masons of New York City for promoting a Masonic procession on St. John's Day (June 24, 1837) without authority. From this time on, the lack of prosperity in the New York Grand Lodge cannot be blamed on anti-Masonry but must be attributed chiefly to the strife among the Masons themselves. However, the Panic of 1837 must not be overlooked as a factor in hindering the recovery of Masonry in New York. But in spite of these factors, additional lodges were restored, and in 1839 the first new lodge since 1828 was granted a warrant. By 1843 there were 93 lodges in the state and the number was increasing rapidly.

In reviewing the anti-Masonic period in New York, several facts stand out as especially interesting. Out of 53 counties in the state, the lodges in 29 counties were entirely extinct in 1836, either through surrender or forfeiture of warrants. Even in New York County, where anti-Masonry made little headway politically, only 22 out of 43 lodges were alive in 1836. Altogether, there were at that time only 71 lodges left in the state, and 14 of these were not in good standing. As a result of the decline in the lodges the Grand Lodge resources dropped from $5,301 in 1827-1828 to $1,631 in 18351836. It is apparent that hundreds of Masons in the state, if they did not openly secede, at least allowed their membership to lapse. But many others dared to defy their persecutors and kept many local lodges, as well as the Grand Lodge, alive and functioning during the period. Great credit must be given to General Morgan Lewis, a veteran of the Revolution, who was Grand Master, 1830-1843, and to James Herring, the Grand Secretary, 1829-1845. The leadership of these two men during the period was of inestimable benefit to the New York Masons.

ANTI-MASONRY IN VERMONT

From New York, as has been pointed out, (3) antiMasonry spread to the neighboring states. In no state were its effects more noticeable than in Vermont. By 1828 the excitement had produced enough effect to reduce the Grand Lodge attendance from 52 in 1827 to 39 in 1828. When the annual communication was held at Montpelier, in October, 1829, 40 out of the 68 lodges then under charter were represented. In only 13 of them had there been any initiations during the year.

At this communication two important things were done. One was to elect Nathan B. Haswell of Burlington as Grand Master and Philip C. Tucker of Vergennes as Deputy Grand Master. The former served continuously until 1847 with Tucker as his Deputy and then was succeeded by the latter. It was these two men who were chiefly instrumental in bringing the Masonic Institution in Vermont through the period of anti-Masonic persecution. The other important action was to issue the famous "Appeal to the Inhabitants of Vermont . . ." This was a pamphlet of twelve pages, written by Philip C. Tucker, and signed by those present at the communication. Two thousand copies were printed and distributed. The "Appeal" traced the development of the anti-Masonic movement, enumerated the charges made against the Masonic Fraternity and then proceeded to deny them in toto. Though the list of signers included many of the most important men in the state, including Governor Samuel C. Crafts and ex-Governor Martin Chittenden, not to mention numerous others, it did not allay the spirit of persecution.

With the complete triumph of the political antiMasons in the state elections of 1831, the condition of Freemasonry became more critical. In the Grand Lodge, on Oct. 11 of that year, a resolution was introduced to the dissolution of the Grand Lodge, but after a heated debate the proposition was defeated by a vote of 99 to 19. However, a recommendation was made to the lodges to hold only two meetings each year, "one for good order and discipline and instruction in Masonry, the other for the yearly choice of officers."

THE POLITICAL FACTOR

The bitterness with which the presidential campaign of 1832 was fought in Vermont was probably responsible for the decline in the representation at the annual communication from 39 in 1831 to 10 in 1832. It was noised abroad that at the next session of the Grand Lodge in 1833 another attempt would be made to secure its dissolution. This resulted in 34 lodges being represented. On Oct. 9, 1833, a preamble and resolution calling for the surrender of the local charters and the dissolution of the Grand Lodge was introduced. Again there was heated debate but when the vote was taken the resolution was defeated 79 to 42.

After the adjournment of the Grand Lodge, the Grand officers, on Oct. 21, 1833, published an address to the people of the state. They reviewed the history of Masonry in Vermont and pointed out that of 73 charters issued since 1794, there were 68 still in force. They charged that those who sought to secure the surrender of charters were not animated by "an honest intention to pacify public opinion," but had "far less honorable motives." They denied that the Masonic Institution had interfered with politics or religion, and closed by warning the people of the dangerous precedent that would be established by the success of the movement to exterminate Masonry.

Only 7 lodges were represented in 1834. The chief business consisted of drawing up and adopting six resolutions, including a reaffirmation of a resolution passed at the previous communication giving lodges permission to surrender their charters, "a measure calculated to relieve [those] who wished to retire from Masonry." At this session the time of the annual communications was changed from October to January, and, as a result, no meeting was held in 1835.

THE EMERGENCY MEASURES TAKEN BY GRAND LODGE

On Jan. 13, 1836, the Grand Lodge met at Burlington, with only nine Grand officers present. These proceeded to elect officers and then passed the following resolution:

Resolved, That the Grand Master, Grand Treasurer and Grand Secretary, with such of the Grand Lodge as may make it convenient, be and they are hereby authorized to attend at the hall of such Lodge on the 2nd Wednesday of January, A. L. 5837 and adjourn said Lodge to the 2nd Wednesday of January, A. L 5838, and thereafter biennially.

This instruction was complied with, and the form of the Grand Lodge organization was preserved until Jan. 14, 1846, when a convention was held at Burlington on the invitation of Grand Master Haswell, sent privately to trusted Masons in the state. Forty-three delegates attended the meeting on the date set. After the convention had considered the matter of reviving the Grand Lodge, the meeting was

dissolved, and the Grand Lodge was declared to be opened, with ten lodges represented. With this beginning the recovery of the Masonic Institution in Vermont proceeded slowly but surely.

THE MOVEMENT IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

Up to 1829, anti-Masonry had hardly made itself felt in New Hampshire. In fact, each year from 1826 to 1828 inclusive, new lodges were chartered, so that the total number rose from 40 in 1825 to 52 in 1828. Three of these were listed in 1826 as being extinct. However, in 1829, no new charters were issued. It was reported to the Grand Lodge that some lodges had been seriously affected by the anti-Masonic excitement. This was reflected in the decreased representation at the annual session at Concord on June 9 and 10. Thereafter the attendance declined until in 1835 only 13 lodges were represented. No action in regard to delinquent lodges was attempted until 1837. At the annual session of that year it was resolved that the lodges should make returns and be represented at the next annual communication or else forfeit their charters.

When the Grand Lodge met in 1838 it was not ready to enforce its decree in relation to delinquent lodges. However, it did revoke one charter while another was surrendered. In 1839 another charter was surrendered. At the 1839 annual session it was reported that 26 lodges had made no returns for periods varying from six to eleven years. But it was left to the 1840 annual session to take the action threatened in 1837, for 26 lodges were declared to have forfeited their charters. Having pruned the dead branches, the Grand Lodge of New Hampshire proceeded on the road to recovery so rapidly that by 1856 it had become stronger than ever before.

THE EFFECT PRODUCED IN MAINE

Up to 1829 there was no tangible evidence that Freemasonry in Maine had been affected by anti-Masonry. Between 1825 and 1829 there were ten new lodges chartered, raising the total from 48 in the first mentioned year to 58 in 1829. At the annual communication at Portland, Jan. 15, 1829, it was reported that three new charters had been issued within the past year. However, at this communication, the Grand Lodge representation was only 23 as compared with 38 in 1828. Further evidence that anti-Masonry was making itself felt is seen in the fact that 18 lodges were reported to have "unsettled accounts" as compared with one so reported in 1827.

At the 1830 communication, official notice was for the first time taken of anti-Masonry when a report was submitted by a committee on "the subject of the peculiar duties of Masons at the present time." The committee advised against the issuance of a public address for the purpose of vindicating Masonry and urged Masons to "quietly let the tempest take its course" endeavoring "to vindicate the sincerity of their profession by a well-ordered life and conversation."

ATTEMPTS TO STEM THE TIDE

In 1831 the Grand Lodge by-laws were amended so as to provide for holding the annual communications at Augusta, in the hope that the decline in representation would be halted. In this hope the Masons of Maine were doomed to disappointment, for the representation declined until in 1837 only the representatives of one lodge together with the Grand officers were present at the annual communication on Jan. 19. At this session the charter of one lodge was declared forfeited. But the

lowest point of Masonic activity in Maine had not yet been reached. When the time arrived for the annual communication on Jan. 20, 1842, not one lodge was represented. Neither was the Grand Master present, so the various Grand offices with the exception of that of Grand Secretary were filled by Grand officers pro tem.

It was not until 1844 that Freemasonry in Maine may be said to have definitely started on the up-grade. At the annual communication at Augusta on Jan. 18 there were represented 19 lodges. Among these were one which had surrendered its charter in 1836 and the one whose charter had been forfeited in 1837. As the representatives of both were allowed to vote this amounted to virtual restoration, though formal restoration did not take place until later. It was decided to again hold the annual communications at Portland Action was also taken to restore such lodges as desired it. Thereafter, satisfactory progress toward complete recovery was made, though quite slowly at first. When the Grand Lodge, on July 4, 1845, broke the ground for the "Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad," it was evident that the spirit of persecution in Maine had melted away.

NOTES

(1) J. Hugo Tatsch, THE BUILDER, August, 1926. (2) This chart will appear at the conclusion of the article. (3) Erik McKinley Eriksson, THE BUILDER, December, 1926.

(To be continued)

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